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ABSTRACT

While numerous studies have examined the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of two-year college students, a composite profile for the approximately 4.5 million credit students at the nation's two-year colleges is more difficult to come by. Within certain limitations, however, a profile can be developed of these students. Two-year colleges enrolled 55% of the American Indian/Alaskan Natives in higher education, 42% of the Black students, 54% of the Hispanic students, 34% of the White students, and 21% of non-resident aliens. Since 1977, women have accounted for slightly over 50% of community college enrollment. According to the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the mean age of students enrolled in 1980 was 27, the median was 23, and the modal age was 19. Data also revealed that, despite their many differences, students at two- and four-year colleges had educational objectives similar to university students. While full-time freshmen at two-year colleges face greater obstacles in terms of income, academic background, and self-esteem, they aspire to the same upward mobility as other college and university students. (MAB)

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Fact Sheet

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Two-Year College Students: A Statistical Profile

What Statistical Data Sources Are Available On Two-Year College Students?

Numerous studies examine the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of two-year college students at individual colleges. A composite profile of the approximately 4.5 million credit students at the nation's two-year colleges is more difficult to come by. Varying data gathering techniques and criteria that are applied by different research organizations often result in incongruous results. Nationwide statistical data on two-year college students can only be regarded as approximate and should be critically viewed within the context of the methodology used in their compilation.

Within these limitations, this Fact Sheet draws upon various statistical sources to provide a general profile of two-year college students. The sources, which are listed at the end of the Fact Sheet, provide information on enrollment trends, demographic characteristics of students, and the general differences between two-year college students and students at four-year colleges and universities.

What Are The Past and Projected Enrollment Trends At Two-Year Colleges?

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveal that, from 1963 through 1979, enrollment at two-year colleges grew from 844,512 to 4,216,666. Cohen and Brawer (1982) outline several reasons for this phenomenal growth, including:

The physical accessibility of the campuses;

The availability of financial aid;

The growing number of part-time students (who constituted 53% of enrollment in 1963 and 62% of enrollment in 1979); and

The maturation of the baby boom generation.

As of Fall 1981, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) reports that there were 4,887,675 students enrolled in credit courses at 1,219 two-year colleges; 62.8% were enrolled part-time. The colleges enrolled an additional 4,088, 513 persons in non-credit programs.

Changing demographic and societal factors, including the dwindling number of college-age persons and decreases in student financial aid, point to modest enrollment declines in the future. According to NCES projections, these declines will peak to a 0.47% enrollment drop between 1985 and 1986; thereafter the declines will taper off to a 0.37% drop between 1986 and 1987, and a 0.02% decline between 1987 and 1988. Part-time students will continue to represent between 61% and 65% of enrollment.

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What Are the Demographic Characterisitics of Two-Year College Students?

Minorities-- Two-year colleges continue to enroll a large proportion of minority students in higher education. The latest NCES statistics available (Fall 1978) indicate that 1% of two-year college students were American Indians or Alaskan Natives; 2.4% were Asians or Pacific Islanders; 11% were Black; 5.6% were Hispanic; 78.6% were White; and 1.3% were non-resident aliens. From a broader perspective, two-year colleges enrolled 55% of American Indian/Alaskan Natives in higher education; 41% of the Asians and Pacific Islanders; 42% of the Black students; 54% of the Hispanic students; 34% of the White students; and 21% of the non-resident aliens.

Sex--Since 1963, NCES statistics show a steady increase in the number of women attending two-year colleges. In 1963, women accounted for 37% of enrollment. This increased to 45% in 1973 and 54% in 1979. Since 1977, women have accounted for slightly over 50% of community college enrollment.

Age--According to the AACJC, the mean age of students enrolled for credit in 1980 was 27; the median age was 23; and the modal age was 19. Thus, ``students just out of high school and those in their early twenties...accounted for half of the student population'' (Cohen and Brawer, p. 31-33).

How Do Two-Year College Students Differ From Students At Other Colleges and Universities?

Two-year college students have a wide variety of ethnic, financial, and personal backgrounds. Thus, composite profiles are difficult to achieve. However, data collected by Astin, et al. allow for a general, composite comparison of the full-time freshmen at two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. Among other findings, their 1980 survey of first-time, full-time freshmen reveals that, of the two-year college students:

46% were in the top 40% of their high school graduating class, compared to 66.9% of four-year college students and 79.7% of the university freshmen;

76.8% were enrolled in college preparatory programs in high school, compared to 90.6% of the four-year college and 95.2% of the university students;

50.3% came from families with a parental income of $20,000 or more, compared to 60% of the four-year college students and 72.7% of the university freshmen;

49.3% had not applied to any other college, compared to 31.7% of the four-year college students and 36.1% of the university students; a smaller percentage were likely to rate themselves above average in social and academic skills than were students at four-year colleges or universities.

Despite these differences, the data also revealed that the three student groups had similar educational objectives. Each group indicated that the three major reasons for attending college were to get a better job, to make more money, and to receive a general education. In addition, 63.8% of the community college students aspired to the Bachelor's or Master's degree; this compares to 70.3% of the four-year college students and 68% of the university freshmen. While

full-time freshmen at two-year colleges face greater obstacles in terms of income, academic background, and self-esteem, they aspire to the same upward mobility that is the goal of other college and university students.

Where Can I Find Additional Information?

Sources of statistical information about two-year college students include:

Astin, A. W., et al. "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1980". Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education; Los Angeles: Graduate School of Education, University of California, 1980.

Cohen, Arthur M. and Florence B. Brawer. "The American Community College". San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982.

Dearman, Nancy B. and Valina White Plisko. "The Condition of Education. 1981 Edition". Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1981.

Olivas, Michael A. "The Dilemma of Access: Minorities in Two-Year Colleges". Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1979.

"1982 Community, Junior, and Technical College Directory". Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1982.

Consult the ERIC database for studies detailing student characteristics at the state, district, and institutional levels. Some of the many ERIC documents describing the numbers and characteristics of two-year college students include:

Apps, Jerold W. "The Adult Learner on Campus: A Guide for Instructors and Administrators". Chicago: Follet Publishing Company, 1981. (ED 201 366; not available from EDRS)

Cohen, Edward G. "A Survey of Student Satisfaction and Needs at Queensborough Community College, Part I". Bayside, NY: Queensborough Community College, 1980. (ED 206 363; 85 pages)

Collins, Thomas R. and Anne McMaster. "Non-Returning Student, Fall 1979-Spring 1980". Trenton, NJ: Mercer County Community College, 1980. (ED 205 253; 23 pages)

"Fall Enrollment Report: University of Hawaii, Community Colleges, Fall 1981". Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 1981. (ED 212 316; 21 pages)

Hunter, Russell and M. Stephen Sheldon. "Statewide Longitudinal Study. Report on Academic Year 1978-79. Part I, Fall Results". Woodland Hills, CA: Los Angeles Pierce College, 1979. (ED 180 530; 86 pages)

_____. "Statewide Longitudinal Study: Report on Academic Year 1978-1979. Part II--Spring Results". Woodland Hills, CA: Los Angeles Pierce College, 1980. (ED 184 636; 99 pages)

_____. "Statewide Longitudinal Study: Report on Academic Year 1979-1980. Part III--Fall Results". Woodland Hills, CA: Los Angeles Pierce College, 1980. (ED 188 714; 95 pages)

_____. "Statewide Longitudinal Study: Report on Academic Year 1979-1980. Part 4--Spring1980 Results". Woodland Hills, CA: Los Angeles Pierce College, 1981. (ED 203 953)

Lucas, John A. "Student Characteristics as Compared to the Community Profile, 1980-1981. Volume 11, Number 13". Palatine, IL: William Rainey Harper College, 1981. (ED 207 666; 37 pages)

Shearon, Ronald W. and others. "Putting Learning to Work: A Profile of Students in North Carolina Community Colleges, Technical Institutes, and Technical Colleges. A Technical Report". Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University, Department of Adult and Community College Education, 1980. (ED 207 624; 266 pages)

Story, Sherie and others. "Washington Community Colleges Fall Quarter Report, 1980". Olympia, WA: Washington State Board for Community Colleges, 1980. (ED 203 896; 90 pages)

Swedler, James A. "A Study of Reverse Transfers Who Entered Northern Illinois University during 1975-76: An Analysis of their Academic Progress". De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, 1981. (ED 210 084; 71 pages)

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